



Young People's  
Learning Agency

# Enterprise and Employment for People with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

A report following three regional conferences  
(November–December 2009)

For information

August 2010

Championing Young  
People's Learning

#### **Further information**

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# Executive Summary

During November and December 2009, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)<sup>1</sup> hosted three regional conferences on the theme of enterprise and employment for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The aim of the conferences was to reflect on the policy landscape and consider the impact that this was having, and likely to have, on future provision.

Delegates had the chance to learn about effective practice, take stock of what was known to work, and to consider how this could be carried forward and sustained beyond March 2010 with the establishment of the new planning, funding and commissioning arrangements under the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA).

There was also an opportunity to update delegates on progress on taking forward the recommendations in *Learning for Work: Employability and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities* (LSC, 2009a).

This report starts with an outline of the policy context in which the conferences took place. This is followed by an overview of the key points from the employers' keynote speeches. Emerging themes from discussions in the workshops and plenary sessions are summarised. Details of some of the provision and programmes that featured in the workshops are provided as case studies.

## Key themes

The key themes that emerged were:

- implementation of foundation learning;
- progression and the transition to employment;
- funding for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities;
- collaborative working.

More details on these four themes, including delegate feedback, appear below:

### Implementation of foundation learning

Delegates sought guidance and information on the implementation of foundation learning (formerly the foundation learning tier or FLT) for learners over 19, and also on funding for job coaches. To improve progression to work provision, funding drawn down through foundation learning has to be sufficiently flexible to support partnership working and focus on work experience rather than qualifications for people with learning difficulties. Key points to emerge were as follows:

- Providers working with learners over 19 who are not subject to a learning difficulty assessment, in provision that will be funded by the Skills Funding Agency, would like clear guidance in how they will be expected to implement foundation learning;
- The cross-governmental strategy announced in *Valuing Employment Now: real jobs for people with learning disabilities* (Department of Health, 2009) stated that funding to support foundation learning could potentially fund job coaches and accredit travel training. Providers would like details on how this will work in practice;
- How can funding that providers draw down for foundation learning be combined with funding from partner organisations to create more flexibility in provision, with a view to improving progression into employment?
- Evidence (Department of Health, 2009) suggests that it is work experience rather than qualifications that assists people with learning difficulties to find employment. Within foundation learning, how can this be reflected in the curriculum and assessment process used for vocational provision for people with learning difficulties?

<sup>1</sup> The responsibilities and duties of the LSC transferred to the Young People's Learning Agency, the Skills Funding Agency and local authorities in April 2010.

### Progression and the transition to employment

Internship programmes and more opportunities for work experience are needed to make transition to work courses more effective. Supported employment organisations and social enterprises have the potential to help with this.

Key points to emerge were as follows:

- There needs to be more capacity to make work experience in real-life settings more available, since this is considered a central part of effective vocational provision;
- Supported employment and the interface with vocational courses and training need to be better developed;
- Social enterprises and social firms may be able to offer work-based learning and employment opportunities. Learning providers want to know more about what is available and how they can develop partnerships for joint working;
- Project Search (see paragraph 51 and Case study 3) is a good example of a clear, structured way of working to support people in progressing and making the transition to employment.

### Funding for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Direct payments and individual budgets have the potential to fund employment support. Train to Gain could support more people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities if it were available for employees working at Entry Level and Level 1. Some learners may progress into work before completing their course and this needs to be recognised and funded as a valid outcome.

Key points to emerge were as follows:

- To better support progression of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are in work, employers should be able to access Train to Gain funding to support learning at Entry Level and Level 1;
- More clarity is needed on how direct payments can be accessed to support work-based learning in social enterprises;
- It would be helpful if more local authorities understood that personal budgets can be used for employment support;

- Progression to employment by an individual before the end of his or her vocational course is not recognised in funding terms as a valid outcome. In order to encourage providers to support learners to make the transition to work at whichever stage is appropriate for the individual learner, it was suggested that there could be an element of job output funding for providers;
- Delegates wanted more information on how Project Search (see paragraph 51) would be funded.

### Collaborative working

Collaborative working at a strategic and operational level between education and training providers, supported employment organisations and employers is essential if more learners are to make the transition from learning to work.

Key points to emerge were as follows:

- Collaborative working is critical to supporting learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as they move into employment. It will need to be built into the implementation of foundation learning, and courses that embed a supported employment approach;
- Joint working between learning providers, social enterprises and social firms has the potential to offer work experience and real-life employment opportunities;
- Employers who are committed to employing people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities recognise and understand the importance of partnership working with supported employment organisations and Jobcentre Plus;
- The Getting a Life programme ([www.gettingalife.org.uk](http://www.gettingalife.org.uk)) is working to bring about strategic and operational change by facilitating increased cross-agency planning and working in order to support young people with learning disabilities in their transition to work and to lead fulfilling lives. The Getting a Life programme is working in 12 sites across England.

### Employer input

Employers that have inclusive recruitment strategies work at a strategic and operational level with local employment forums and a range of specialist partners including colleges, Jobcentre Plus and supported employment organisations. Delegates recognised the importance of employers understanding the process of supported employment and their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act, if more disabled people are to be employed.

Two employers made presentations at the conferences, one representing a city council and the other a large supermarket chain. Both employers were involved in local employment partnerships as a route to employing people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and people from disadvantaged groups.

Both employers work closely with supported employment organisations and Jobcentre Plus.

Key points to emerge were as follows:

- The motivation of employers to recruit people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities stems from the need for the workforce to reflect the diversity of the community, access to a pool of motivated individuals, and strategic commitment to the improvement of services for disabled people both as employees and as members of the public;
- The benefits of employing people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were recognised and include: increased staff morale, reduced staff turnover and reduced absence;
- Jobcentre Plus offers financial support to employers who employ people who have been on benefits for more than six months, along with funding for work training in some cases;
- A written contribution from an employer who runs a small business highlighted the importance of the support of a local college, which provides external training. This business won an award for its inclusive practice;
- Conference delegates felt that there was a particular need to raise employer awareness of the contribution that people with mental health difficulties could make to the workforce where effective support was in place;
- Delegates felt it was important for employers to understand more about supported employment;
- There was concern from delegates as to whether employers value accreditation gained through foundation learning courses;
- Employers have responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act and may need reminding of these.





# 1: Background

1 The enterprise and employment conferences were held at a time of significant change in the learning and skills sector, with fewer than six months to the transfer of responsibilities from the LSC to the YPLA, Skills Funding Agency and local authorities.

2 The conferences were held over a three-week period (from 13 November to 7 December 2009), which coincided with the publication of a number of key learning and skills sector strategies and policy documents:

- *Skills Investment Strategy 2010-11* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), 2009);
- *Guidance for the section 139a assessment (assessment of learning difficulty)* (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2009), which advised that from April 2010 local authorities will be responsible for arranging learning provision for 19–25 year olds where a learning difficulty assessment is in place supported by the Young People's Learning Agency;
- *National Commissioning Framework (NCF) for the provision of learning for young people in England aged 16–19, or aged up to 25 if subject to learning difficulty assessment* (YPLA, 2010), which set out the core systems for planning, commissioning, procuring and funding education and training for 16–19 year olds, young people up to age 25 where a learning difficulty assessment is in place, and young offenders in youth custody. Following the Secretary of State announcement on 19 July 2010 with regard to the simplification of the 16–19 funding system, this document will be updated and provide an overview of the system to be put in place for funding education and training for young people in England from August 2010 and also describe the funding of apprenticeships for 16–19 year olds by the National Apprenticeship Service.

## Aims of the conferences

3 The purpose of the conferences was to discuss policy and practice relating to vocational training and courses leading to the employment of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This comes at a time of great challenge within a tough economic climate and the threat of rising unemployment, in particular for young people. The conference aims were to:

- launch *Learning for Work* (LSC, 2009a);
- present the findings of a social firms and social enterprises project including their links with the learning and skills sector in supporting people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into employment;
- provide an opportunity to share policy and practice developments that enable people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to progress into employment;
- discuss and communicate arrangements to take forward the LSC's *Learning for Living and Work and Mental Health strategies* (LSC, 2006; LSC, 2009b).

## Audience

4 The target audience comprised those working across the learning and skills sector:

- Connexions and information, advice and guidance professionals;
- disability employment advisers;
- members of education business partnerships;
- employers, including social enterprises and social firms;
- Jobcentre Plus disability employment advisers;
- representatives of local authorities, particularly professionals with responsibility for transition and person-centred planning;
- regional and local LSC staff with a lead in either skills or provision for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their successors at the YPLA and the Skills Funding Agency;
- school staff with responsibility for transition planning;
- representatives of supported employment agencies in public and voluntary sectors.

## Programme

5 Peter Little OBE chaired the conferences and delivered a keynote speech on the National Apprenticeship Service and people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Peter also provided an update on the progress of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill (now enacted) through Parliament.

6 Keynote speeches were delivered on:

- the cross-government strategy *Valuing Employment Now* (Department of Health, 2009);
- plans to take forward the Learning for *Living and Work* strategy (LSC, 2006);
- the employer's perspective of inclusive practice when working with employees who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

7 A question-and-answer session provided delegates with the opportunity to raise points for further discussion with the keynote speakers and panel, which included colleagues from the national and regional LSC, DCSF and Department of Health.

8 A choice of five workshops was offered to delegates:

- **Foundation learning and support into employment:** update on foundation learning and vocational provision;
- **Project Search:** a description of the American internship model of training in which people with learning disabilities are assisted in securing and retaining full-time, paid permanent employment. The model will be established across 14 sites in England during 2010;
- **Getting a Life programme:** an opportunity to hear from sites involved in the three-year cross-governmental programme to develop a multi-agency approach to supporting people with learning disabilities aged 14–25 to progress into paid employment and lead fulfilling lives;
- **A Job Well Done:** findings of a project looking at the role of social enterprise and social firms and their links with the learning and skills sector in supporting people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities into employment;
- **Skills and employment and people with mental health difficulties:** discussion of effective practice for routes into work for people with mental health difficulties.

9 The conferences concluded with a summary of the main themes to emerge from the keynote speeches and workshops.

## 2: Policy Context

10 The conferences included keynote speeches on three key policy drivers influencing the learning and skills sector:

- *Learning for Living for Work* (LSC, 2006);
- *LSC Mental Health Strategy* (LSC, 2009b);
- *Valuing Employment Now* (Department of Health, 2009);
- Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act.

### Learning for Living and Work

11 Increasing economic participation through sustainable employment was one of the priority areas set out in *Learning for Living and Work* (LSC, 2006) for the period 2006 to 2010. This priority underpinned the development of vocational provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the learning and skills sector. The YPLA will continue to support the principles detailed within the strategy.

12 The LSC announced at the conferences that the YPLA would produce an inclusion strategy outlining how *Learning for Living and Work* (LSC, 2006) and the *LSC Mental Health Strategy* (LSC, 2009b) were to be taken forward for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

13 The LSC outlined the work that it had been doing with the Department for Education (formerly DCSF) in preparation for the transfer to the YPLA:

- transition arrangements that put learners at the centre, so they experience the minimum disruption to their education and training;
- the development of a personalised approach to provision that meets the needs of young people, particularly as a third of those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) have learning difficulties and/or disabilities;
- effective and accessible information, advice and guidance (IAG) for young people, with local authorities and children's trusts working together to ensure that all of the available IAG will be co-ordinated to support participation by young people;

- multi-agency working between healthcare, social care and education providers to plan local packages of provision with the right support for young people;
- providers working together to combine and co-ordinate delivery and funding.

14 It was announced at the conferences that an evaluation of the development funding (investment for change) projects had been undertaken by the LSC. Examples of how development funding has been used to take forward the recommendations of *Learning for Living and Work* (LSC, 2006) included:

- development of around 20 social enterprises;
- funds contributing to the Getting a Life programme;
- funding for job coaches and the provision of support and mentors on work placements;
- 25 colleges developing programmes and partnerships to enable pathways and transition to work;
- around 40 providers developing supported employment programmes and models.

### LSC Mental Health Strategy

15 The refresh of the *LSC Mental Health Strategy* (LSC, 2009a) takes in the LSC's core ambition that by 2015, England will be an international exemplar in providing high-quality post-16 learning provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The LSC's vision was that people who experience mental health difficulties should, by accessing learning and skills provision, be able to lead active and fulfilling lives as part of their communities and in education, training and employment, in a way that sustains mental wellbeing.

16 Challenging the stigma and discrimination within the labour market about mental health, and working to develop positive strategies to support employers in recruiting, training and re-skilling people with mental health difficulties are priorities in the strategy. The headline actions to take forward the strategy in 2009-10 included:

- the LSC's commitment to continue in 2009-10 towards being an exemplary employer in recruiting and retaining people who experience mental health difficulties and continuing to encourage and support all its partner agencies to become mindful employers and to create mental health-friendly environments;
- the LSC to explore and map models of integrated support that result in improved social outcomes and employment opportunities for people who experience mental health difficulties;
- the LSC to improve the take-up of work-based learning opportunities by people with mental health difficulties, including the take-up of Train to Gain and volunteering.

17 The LSC mental health strategy acknowledges the importance of the public service agreement 16 targets (PSA 16) for socially excluded adults (Cabinet Office, 2007), which focus on improving employment opportunities for people with severe and enduring mental health difficulties.

## Valuing Employment Now

18 A further significant addition to the changing policy context was the launch of the cross-government strategy *Valuing Employment Now: real jobs for people with learning disabilities* (Department of Health, 2009). The goal of the strategy is to radically increase the number of people with moderate and severe learning disabilities in real jobs by 2025 and for as many as possible of these jobs to be 16+ hours a week. This would mean 48 per cent of people with moderate or severe learning disabilities being in real jobs (in England, this amounts to around 45,000 more people than is currently the case).

19 *Valuing Employment Now* (Department of Health, 2009) emphasises that this goal can only be achieved with collaborative working between agencies. The role of schools and colleges is central to creating a culture where people with learning disabilities and/or difficulties assume from a young age that they will get a job.

20 As part of the implementation of the strategy, the Department for Employment (formerly DCSF) is examining incentives in the funding system, e.g. bonuses when students on courses get jobs.

21 The cross-government delivery team based at the office of the national director at the Department of Health is leading on the implementation of *Valuing Employment Now* (Department of Health, 2009). The Getting a Life and Project Search programmes are also part of this team. Department of Health funding for regions on PSA 16 will be used to support delivery of the strategy.

## Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act

22 The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act (the Act) was enacted on 12 November 2009, one day before the first of the enterprise and employment conferences. It took forward the proposals in *Raising Expectations: enabling the system to deliver* (DCSF & DIUS, 2008) including the dissolution of the LSC and transfer of responsibilities to local authorities for securing the provision of education and training for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities aged 16–19, and those with a learning difficulty assessment up to the age of 25. The YPLA will support local authorities in this work. Responsibility for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities aged 19 or over who do not have a learning difficulty assessment and who are accessing mainstream provision will rest with the Skills Funding Agency.

23 The Act also took forward legislation set out in the draft Apprenticeships Bill (July 2008). Apprenticeships are an important employment route for some disabled people. The Act places Apprenticeships on a statutory basis for the first time and includes minimum entry requirements for the Apprenticeship offer. The employer role is key as Apprenticeships confer the status of employment on participants. Standards will be set by the employer-led sector skills councils.

24 Following extensive lobbying and discussion whilst the Act was progressing through Parliament, the government tabled amendments at the report stage in the House of Lords, which would allow ministers to take powers to:

- allow alternative evidence by some disabled people to show that they are ready to embark on an Apprenticeship;
- increase flexibility for entry up to the age of 25.

25 The significance of this flexibility is that it recognises that some disabled young people are more ready to enter Apprenticeships aged 19–24 than at 16–18, just when many become ready to start. Many people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who could be successful on an Apprenticeship programme were being excluded because of the entry requirements.

26 Apprenticeships operate at Level 2 and above and some learners will require pre-apprenticeship activity as part of foundation learning. Apprenticeships may be offered as 16–18 provision (as part of a 14–19 offer), 19–24 provision or provision for those aged 25 and over. As qualifications at Levels 2 and 3, Apprenticeships do not meet the needs of some people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Work is ongoing to make Apprenticeships even more inclusive. Access to internships and Apprenticeships for people with learning difficulties are priorities of *Valuing Employment Now* (Department of Health, 2009).

## Public service agreement 16

27 Public service agreement<sup>2</sup> 16 (PSA 16) was introduced in October 2007. Its aim is to increase the proportion of socially excluded adults in settled accommodation and employment, education or training. PSA 16 focuses on four client groups:

- care leavers at age 19;
- offenders under probation supervision;
- adults receiving secondary mental health services;
- adults with moderate to severe learning disabilities.

28 PSA targets should be included in local strategic agreements such as those formed by local strategic partnerships and also be part of local area agreements. In order to meet PSA 16 targets at a local level, local authorities are expected to work collaboratively with key partners such as Jobcentre Plus, adult learning providers and the voluntary sector to co-ordinate support for skills and employment across localities so that provision meets the specific employment and skills needs of the four client groups.

<sup>2</sup> PSAs set out departmental commitments to improve the value for money and efficiency of public services.

# 3: The Employer's View: Working with Inclusion

29 Each of the conferences featured a keynote speech entitled: Working with inclusion: the employer's view. The employer perspective was presented by senior HR managers from Sainsbury's and Coventry City Council. Both organisations work through their local employment partnerships (LEPs) and Jobcentre Plus to support people from disadvantaged groups into paid work and to support those who have been unemployed long term to re-enter the workforce.

30 Sainsbury's and Coventry City Council have employed people with a range of disabilities and health conditions and provide specialist support when required, using the expertise of their partners in this work including Remploy, Pure Innovations<sup>3</sup> and Mencap.

31 Inclusion in the workplace is regarded by Sainsbury's as key to its success, as customers want employees to reflect the diversity and socio-economic range of the areas in which its stores are located. As there is a large number of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who want to work but few who have a paid job, Sainsbury's is concerned that this represents a huge group of untapped talent that:

*could turn into your most valued, motivated and loyal employees and isn't a question over skill or will<sup>4</sup>.*

32 Sainsbury's identified a number of benefits of employing people with learning difficulties in its stores:

- increased loyalty;
- compliments from customers;
- reduced staff turnover and absence;
- increased morale;

- positive press coverage locally and nationally;
- access to specialist support from local partnerships and supported employment organisations;
- financial support from Jobcentre Plus for recruits if they have been on benefits for more than six months and potentially £1,500 for work training in certain cases.

33 The speaker from Sainsbury's offered the following tips to supported employment agencies on how best to support employers:

- Keep your plan simple and know what you are talking about, as employers are busy;
- Deal with all paperwork regarding benefits;
- Deal with parents and get the supported employment agency to help with this;
- Stick with it, using ongoing support from the supported employment agency and stress what is positive – that you will always be there.

34 Coventry City Council, working closely with Remploy, has provided work training placements for Jobcentre Plus clients with a disability or health condition, including people with learning difficulties, mental health difficulties, visual and hearing impairments, limited mobility and epilepsy. Disabled clients have progressed into a range of jobs, including clerical assistant, social worker, cleaner, gardener, driver, library assistant, domestic assistant, examination invigilator, postal clerk, site services officer and care assistant.

35 There is a strong working partnership between Coventry City Council, Remploy and Jobcentre Plus. This partnership takes a shared, problem-solving approach and is based on a practical, day-to-day working relationship and mutual trust

<sup>3</sup> Pure Innovations is a national supported employment organisation that delivers services to a range of client groups including people with learning disabilities, mental health difficulties, young people leaving care and people with physical and sensory disabilities.

<sup>4</sup> Presentation by Matt Walter, Sainsbury's HR Manager, to the enterprise and employment conference in York on 7 December 2009.

where data and information are shared and resources are combined to achieve delivery. This joint work to achieve targets and overcome barriers involves:

- flexibility and creativity with reasonable adjustments in the selection process;
- no wordy application forms;
- face-to-face interviews at Remploy offices;
- competency-based phone screening;
- bulk recruitment;
- job fairs and open days with interviews taking place in local communities;
- Remploy support during the selection process;
- work trials in the form of extended practical interviews;
- work placements.

**36** Coventry City Council's Aspire scheme supports a range of disabled people using a supported employment approach and provides work experience, individual assessment and nine-month paid placements. The council's HR team has developed a manager's guide and an employee's guide based on its experience of this work. Staff from the Aspire scheme report to the corporate disability group, which advises directorates and the management board on actions that need to be taken to ensure the efficient implementation of council policies in relation to disabled people. The group also acts as a focus for the improvement of services to disabled people, both employees and members of the public.

## Employer awareness

**37** At the conferences, employer awareness was raised as an important issue in enabling people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to access employment. It was accepted that there are good examples of employers being proactive around inclusion and being willing to employ disabled people. However, it was felt that there was a particular need to raise employer awareness of the potential contribution individuals with mental health difficulties can make when effective supported employment practice is in place.

**38** At the conference, consideration was given to the central question: Do employers have an understanding of supported employment and do they value accreditation gained through foundation learning?

**39** There was a reminder of the responsibilities that employers have under the Disability Discrimination Act and of the need to be mindful of this when developing partnerships.

**40** Russell Marlow Painting and Decorating was the winner of the Micro Employer of the Year Award at the Apprenticeships Awards in 2009. Mr Marlow was unable to attend in person, but he sent information on the work he undertakes to promote inclusion in the workplace. An edited extract is given as Case study 1.



## Case study 1: Inclusion: an employer's perspective

When I set up my painting and decorating business in 2005, I vowed not to employ anyone. Too much hassle, too much responsibility, too many regulations. However, I was soon craving company and someone to share progress with. From a practical viewpoint, demand was exceeding my capacity after six months and I had to revisit my preconceptions about employment and develop a strategy to deal with the complexities involved.

Young hopefuls had started to ring me asking for work. Impressed by their initiative, I interviewed and took on a lad part time, then another on a full-time basis. Through this process I realised that the act of employing someone represents a hugely valuable gift to that individual. I remembered how I had felt when I got my first (and only) job at Midland Bank – the injection of confidence, the self-realisation, the relief, the dreams fulfilled. This gift is precious and needs to be carefully targeted.

The people I employ therefore have to meet market-led criteria, show a willingness to learn, be able and prepared to fit into the team and display the potential to become a good decorator. So I was looking for special people, yet people who had not been previously seen as special, people who needed a leap of faith by an employer. Learning difficulties, personal circumstances, family history and disabilities can all blight employability, yet personal qualities such as honesty, humility, physical fitness, desire and ambition, if encouraged, can allow the individual to transcend other shortcomings.

I believed I had the patience, purpose and ability to provide the opportunity to those who needed it most and in the process build something unique – a business that cared as much for its employees as its customers. A business that was not focused on maximising income. A business with a genuine social purpose. A business committed to improvement, skill acquisition and excellence. A business that gives its customers something special in their homes, whilst getting the job done to a high standard.

As I employed successive people, a pattern began to emerge – dyslexia, deafness, split families, drugs, depression, learning difficulties, communication problems (although not all in the same individuals). All this created a challenging mixture involving unpredictability and risk. I decided to bring some structure into managing the team.

I engaged a business improvement coach to help us go through the Investors in People (IiP) process. Some of the building blocks were already in place. I had developed strong, trusting relationships with each of my employees. I had implemented a wide-ranging and formal written performance appraisal system, focused on development as adults and as decorators. I had encouraged an open culture by discussing all the key decisions facing the business, some of which required soul-searching on my part.

IiP allowed these risk reduction strategies, which encouraged commitment and loyalty, to become strengthened and joined up by adopting best practice. By implementing this and the Full Modern Apprenticeship Framework as the training standard for employees, we have created the best scenario for employees as they are required to learn and perform to a set of benchmarks and invest effort in their own futures. Indeed, I believe it is this exposure to reality that is crucial to their long-term success and self-sufficiency.

Having the support of an external training provider (Chichester College) is a great benefit. Frankly it is a strain to deal with a series of personal problems, reliability issues, mistakes and other distractions without assuming total responsibility for training. I seek to reinforce and build on college work and focus attention on becoming a better team player, a more efficient worker and an excellent decorator.

Whilst we are tolerant and forgiving of each other's shortcomings and limitations, laziness and lack of concentration are challenged. We must not forget that our customers require the expected outcome within the agreed timescale. We must be organised, professional and well-behaved. Being soft on ourselves is not a viable option. Building a good reputation benefits us all. Learning commercial reality is a good thing.

I have been repeatedly amazed and impressed by the willingness and enthusiasm of my young team to work together and achieve. Their friendliness and courtesy towards each other have been an inspiration. However, sometimes, despite my best efforts, individuals have not been able to sustain themselves and fall away. Often this followed a significant investment of time and energy on my part to help them move forward in their lives, to help them escape the clutches of their past. I felt disappointment and failure. I just hope that what they have learnt in their time with us helps in a positive way in the future.



So why have I gone down a track that is strewn with potholes, rocks, sharp thorns and broken bridges? As a Christian, I see that the easy way is tempting, but the pitfalls more dangerous. More importantly, I have found I can do something that really makes a difference to people whose options are severely limited, who have been prevented from doing what they want to by cruel circumstances or by the simple fact that no employer wants to know.

Customers give the team great feedback and thank them by saying 'It has been lovely having you here'. On one occasion, our customer was a teacher and proceeded to give us all a detailed debrief. She identified all our key standards: no swearing, friendship among ourselves, willingness to learn, courtesy, attention to detail, good organisation and hard work. Everyone stood around basking in the reflected glow of recognition and praise. I felt so proud of them, and proud that the principles we hold dear are not only valued by our customers, but are exhibited by us in such a way that they get noticed. Bull's-eye!

I have proved to myself and to my team that our model is commercially viable and sustainable. With a combination of patience, risk-taking, faith, effort, hope, hard work and luck we have all demonstrated that it works.

#### **Russell Marlow**

Proprietor

Russell Marlow Painting and Decorating

## **The employee's view**

41 At the London conference, David, a young man of 27 who lives independently in Dagenham and has a learning disability, talked about his experience of working. He told the audience about his job and how good it feels to work.

### **Case study 2: Graduated support: an employee's view**

David works 10 hours a week in an office support role in the Civic Centre in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. This is David's first paid job following various work experience and voluntary placements. He started paid employment in June 2009 following a successful four-week working interview. David had full support at the start of his working interview from an employment officer at the supported employment organisation Pure Innovations. With the experience and confidence he had gained at a previous workplace, David had become independent in his role by the end of the third week. At this point, the employment officer began to reduce support gradually. The people David works with in the office felt that he was doing a good job and should be offered the post.

David is very proud of his role in the business support department of the council. He works for three different offices within this department and his regular jobs include shredding, photocopying, taking items to the post room, opening the post, stamping the post and distributing it to the correct desk, keeping the coffee machine filled up with water and sachets, and maintaining the tea-making area and facilities. All the staff working with David comment on his enthusiasm, cheerfulness and ready smile. David has made himself known to staff in different offices and departments by helping out generally, for example by opening doors and carrying items, and he has also taught other members of staff how to get the photocopier to sort and staple documents.

Pure Innovations is continuing to assist David in developing his skills and increasing the number of hours he works.

## Progress update

42 Delegates were updated on progress made on taking forward a number of the recommendations in *Learning for Work* (LSC, 2009a). These progress updates are detailed in Table 1, along with their corresponding recommendations.

**Table 1: Recommendations from *Learning for Work* (LSC, 2009a) and progress updates**

Recommendation	Progress update
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The LSC should research existing examples of social firms and enterprises in the regions with a view to publishing a good practice guide for post-16 education and training providers that will raise awareness and encourage involvement in this area of work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each conference featured workshops that presented the interim findings from a LSC-funded project that aimed to develop a good practice guide on social enterprises, the learning and skills sector and the potential for partnerships for the education, training and employment of disabled people.</li> <li>Delegates were able to feed back on the project's interim findings and on the draft plan for the good practice guide. Each workshop also featured a presentation by a representative from a social enterprise about partnership work with a learning provider.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The National Apprenticeship Service should make funding available and give priority to improving participation and completion rates in Apprenticeships by disabled learners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During early 2010 the LSC commissioned the 'Through Inclusion to Apprenticeship' project with an objective to provide an up-to-date description and analysis of the issues concerning the inclusion of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Apprenticeships. The findings from the project will be published during Autumn 2010.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The LSC, the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) and other stakeholders need to ensure that providers are kept informed and consulted on the development of foundation learning and its ties with the supported employment model. They should monitor these developments within the progression pathways pilots in order to ensure that they are offering realistic routes into work.</li> <li>The LSC and QCDA should clarify and produce a suitable funding model for the progression pathways to support employment and independent living.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delegates attended workshops about the development of foundation learning for learners aged 14–19.</li> <li>Questions that delegates had about funding foundation learning and provision for learners over 19 were recorded and taken by Peter Little to the DCSF (now the Department for Education) foundation learning stakeholders group.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The LSC should restate its intention that it 'will no longer fund providers to deliver work-preparation programmes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities that do not focus on learning in the workplace and the supported employment model' (LSC, 2006:26).</li> <li>It should work to ensure that this is carried through in the transition to the new arrangements post-2010 with local authorities, the YPLA and the SFA.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In November 2009, speaking about the transfer of responsibilities from the LSC, Peter Lauener, chief executive designate of the YPLA, stated that 'the transfer provides a real opportunity to improve provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities by enabling local authorities, supported by the YPLA, to take forward the <i>Learning for Living and Work</i> strategy'.</li> </ul>

# 4: Key Themes

43 The key themes that emerged from the three conferences were:

- implementation of foundation learning;
- progression and the transition to employment;
- funding for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities;
- collaborative working.
- whether the qualification and credit framework is sufficiently broad and flexible to be fully inclusive of all learners working at Entry Level and Level 1; for instance would it recognise and accredit lateral progression?
- whether information on good practice from the foundation learning pilots would be disseminated in time to support the introduction of foundation learning;
- whether employers are aware of and value foundation learning accreditation;
- how to manage the situation where learners take longer to learn than the guided learning hours set out in the qualifications and credit framework;
- as *Valuing Employment Now* (Department of Health, 2009) states that work experience rather than qualifications helps people with learning difficulties enter employment, how this can be reflected within foundation learning in the curriculum and assessment process used for vocational provision for people with learning difficulties.

## Implementation of foundation learning

44 In November and December 2009, providers were working towards the September 2010 deadline for the implementation of foundation learning as the route for education provision at Entry Level and Level 1. Workshops held at each of the conferences provided information on the implementation of foundation learning for 14-19 year olds. Providers requested guidance on the implementation of foundation learning provision for learners over 19, which falls within the remit of the Skills Funding Agency.

45 Foundation learning was highlighted in *Valuing Employment Now* (Department of Health, 2009) as a possible way to fund job coaches. This was the subject of much discussion at each conference, and discussions were ongoing between DCSF and the LSC.

46 The role of foundation learning as a means to accredit travel training and as a route to supported employment for people with learning difficulties was also highlighted in *Valuing Employment Now* (Department of Health, 2009) and was welcomed by delegates. Providers requested clarification on how this would work in practice.

47 The key issues and questions raised as part of the discussion of foundation learning centred on promoting a suitable curriculum whilst aligning this with employment outcomes, and more specifically included:

- how funding for foundation learning could potentially fund job coaches and accredit travel training as outlined in *Valuing Employment Now* (Department of Health, 2009);

## Progression and the transition to employment

48 More opportunities to access work experience in real-life work settings and increasing the capacity of supported employment provision were regarded by delegates as crucial if greater numbers of learners are to progress and make the transition from college to employment. There was interest in the potential role that social enterprises and social firms could play in offering high-quality, work-based learning and real-life employment opportunities. However, learning providers were sometimes not aware of this potential. A recurring theme emerging from the workshops was a request from learning providers for details of the social enterprises and social firms operating in their area so that approaches could be made for partnership working. Social enterprises and social firms also wanted more opportunities to network with learning providers.

49 In some cases, learning providers were considering setting up social enterprises in order to provide more places for work-focused activities and employment. A request for case studies and information on how to undertake this was made. It was stressed that it can be a challenge for learning providers to establish a social enterprise, particularly in the area of business planning and commercial awareness. Getting local business people onto management boards could help with this.

## Tukes

50 Tukes, the subject of Case study 2, is an organisation that provides training, qualifications and work experience to people who have mental health difficulties. It has also been successful in supporting people into employment.

### Case study 2: Supported employment and inclusion

Tukes was set up in July 2003 at the North East Lincolnshire NHS Care Trust<sup>5</sup> to provide training and employment opportunities to people who have little or no previous training, qualifications or work experience due to mental health difficulties. The scheme aimed to replace traditional day-care services by delivering services such as catering and domestic functions to the remodelled mental health services locally while also creating employment opportunities.

Tukes was part-funded by the European Social Fund and Single Regeneration Budget, which ceased in December 2005. In the long term, Tukes hopes to become a social firm providing a full range of ancillary services to the local mental health trust and the wider community. It has a turnover of over £520,000 of which £300,000 is generated through contracts and service level agreements.

Starting from a small coffee shop run by two staff members and a handful of service users, Tukes has in a short time opened five cafés, a buffet service, a conference facility (used by businesses and local agencies), a computer suite, a property maintenance service, and a garden and grounds maintenance service, and also delivers two large cleaning contracts. Tukes involves agencies throughout the community and is well known in the area and further afield, having forged links with the local college, North East Lincolnshire Council, employment agencies, Jobcentre Plus, the Shaw Trust and numerous other agencies.

Since the scheme began, 350 qualification certificates have been awarded and over 70 people have gone into employment. Of those, 30 now work for Tukes, having successfully competed against external candidates. Tukes also runs a variety of short courses including provision in literacy and numeracy, computer skills, basic food hygiene, basic first aid, fire awareness, health and safety and customer care. In a survey carried out by members, 84 per cent of those who responded said that their mental health had improved or remained stable since joining Tukes.

Tukes has sought to break down the 'them' and 'us' divide that often exists within services and aims to involve members in running the business as much as possible. Approximately 500 people with mental health difficulties have accessed Tukes in the six years it has been running.

Tukes also takes on work placements from various training and employment agencies in the area. Whilst providing opportunities for these people, the arrangement also means that people without mental health difficulties are working alongside those with mental health difficulties, thus further reducing the barriers and stigmas associated with mental health.

<sup>5</sup> A care trust is an arrangement in which a local NHS trust works with a local authority to offer both health and social care. Care trusts carry out a range of services, including social care, mental health services and primary care services.

## Project Search

51 Project Search is an American internship model of training in which people with learning disabilities are assisted in securing and retaining full-time, paid permanent employment. The model will be established across 14 sites in England during 2010. Feedback from the Project Search workshops showed that this model of working was recognised as being particularly strong in supporting the transition to work. The strengths of the model were that:

- it is clear and well-structured, with clear, attainable work-based goals;
- the quality and level of support are priorities, with a requirement for early agreement by all involved including parents and carers;
- it involves real-life work experience;
- it manages the transition from college to work with a view to avoiding the revolving door situation in which learners do not progress through their learning to more fulfilling lives and employment but return to a day centre or home activity.

### Case study 3: Project Search

Project Search is described as an education to employment transition programme, the basis of which is a business-led partnership between employer, education provider and supported employment provider. Project Search is based on a model originating in Cincinnati, Ohio and conference heard about the progress made at two sites in England, Norwich and Leicester.

In the Project Search model, training is done on the job through a series of three 12-week internships, or unpaid work-experience rotations. These rotations and internships are real jobs based at the employer's premises. Students spend the whole day at the business, not in an education environment.

Staff from the college provide pastoral care and support with learning to the trainees through a tutor who is based on the host employer's premises. They also work with partners to develop the curriculum and provide support.

The aims of Project Search are to:

- meet employer needs in recruiting and retaining staff for complex and systematic roles;
- break the cycle of 'continuous education' that does not progress;
- enable students to gain practical skills and experience in the workplace;
- avoid dependency on adult social services;
- enable candidates to understand the employment cycle;
- support candidates by providing opportunities that have a significant presence on their CV and access to a range of potential referees.

A government-led evaluation of Project Search commenced in January 2010. There is a planned roll-out of the model in 14 sites later in the year.

## Funding

52 Joined-up funding is needed for vocational provision to encompass the whole journey from training and work experience through to support for the transition to employment and on-the-job support if required. Discussions raised the following points:

- There is a need to make Train to Gain employee funding more flexible in order to cover training for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who are in paid employment and working at foundation learning level;
- Local authorities using personal budgets need to be clear that they can be used for employment support. This should be clarified through the work of the Valuing Employment Now team;
- Project Search is an impressive model, but can funding be flexible enough to make it happen?
- The potential of foundation learning to fund job coaches is welcome but when will this be put into practice?
- Funding for learning providers needs to be designed so that the transition to employment is made integral by including an element of job output funding.
- Guidance is needed on how direct payments can be used to support work-focused activity in social enterprises and social firms as this may promote the development of social enterprises and firms that can offer work experience and paid employment.

## Collaborative working

53 The importance of agencies working in partnership at a strategic and operational level to support people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to move into employment is well recognised. At the conferences, partnership working was highlighted as a critical success factor in the following contexts:

- **Foundation learning providers** need to work in partnership with their local authorities, other providers and related stakeholders such as Connexions. Successful partnership working is expected to include joint planning, staff development activities, sharing expertise, resources, and facilities, and developing common processes;
- **Social enterprises/firms** and learning providers can discover the reciprocal benefits of working together and develop the potential to offer high-quality, work-based learning and real-life employment opportunities to learners;

- **Supported employment** is illustrated by the Project Search model and the keynote speeches from employers;
- **The Getting a Life programme** indicates that partnership working can bring together knowledge, which can be joined up in a locality and provide information about the range of expertise and services available.

54 Lack of coherent transition planning to support young people with learning difficulties to move into work was a concern expressed at the conferences. There were fears that this process had the potential to become more complicated with the Machinery of Government changes after March 2010. It was recognised that there was a need for organisations to work together to make sure that the changes did not have a negative effect.

55 Increasing the effectiveness of multi-agency working and planning for transition is the focus of the Getting a Life programme, which brings together all the agencies in a local area that have responsibilities for supporting young people (aged 14-25) with learning disabilities into work. The programme found that there is a need to raise the expectations and aspirations of people with learning disabilities, their families and the professionals who work with them (Case study 4).

## Case study 4: Getting a Life

The Getting a Life programme ([www.gettingalife.org.uk](http://www.gettingalife.org.uk)) is working on 12 sites across England. On each site, the programme is working with 30 young people and their families. It is supporting local systems to learn from the young people and their families about what needs to change locally in order to bring about strategic change. Part of the learning has involved collecting information and evidence from the sites about the barriers to employment and feeding this information to government departments through the cross-government employment strategy *Valuing Employment Now* (Department of Health, 2009) and other cross-government working arrangements.

The Getting a Life programme has identified the following success criteria:

- Funding streams have been integrated;
- Transition planning, customised employment support and personalisation have been brought together;
- People have received an education that has helped them to 'get a life';
- Agencies are truly working together in the sites;
- Learning has been shared across the region and systems are changing;
- Successful models have been demonstrated;
- Government departments are responding to blocks that have been identified;

A number of concerns, some specific to education and training provision, had arisen, namely:

- There is an expectation that young people with learning disabilities will complete two 'sixth forms' from age 16 to at least 21, yet this does not lead to employment or improved life chances. For example, young people may be offered the same course at college that they have just completed in the last year of school with no realistic goal of moving into employment as the aim of the course;
- There is a need for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to access the whole curriculum and so progress into employment. Very often young people are only offered discrete courses rather than the wider curriculum offer, where for instance a learner could access a mainstream vocational training course or an Apprenticeship with support;
- Work experience in a real-life workplace environment that is external to the college needs to be universally on offer to people with learning difficulties on discrete or mainstream vocational courses. This is a particular concern for young people with learning difficulties who also often miss out earlier at school in Year 9 (at age 14) when it is an expectation that their non-disabled peers will undertake work experience.

# 5: Conclusion

**56** All the conferences were fully subscribed, with waiting lists for two of the three events. This indicates considerable interest in this area of work at a time of great change and challenge.

**57** Feedback from delegates reflected the main themes that emerged from the conferences and was largely positive and constructive. Delegates did have some concerns however:

- a lack of input on issues to do with learners with mental health difficulties;
- the need for more information about foundation learning for learners over 19 and in relation to part-time provision;
- further clarity on funding for the supported employment model;
- how employers can realistically employ people with learning disabilities in current economic climate when there is massive competition for posts.

**58** The largely positive comments from the evaluations indicated that the keynote speeches were regarded as a valuable way to keep up to date with new developments and gain an understanding of learner and employer needs. The conferences provided a valued opportunity to share policy, practical developments and good practice in enabling people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to progress into employment.



# Annex

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